



Moral Issues

Most violence is regarded as wrong and to be avoided if possible. It is generally accepted that, wherever possible, war should be replaced by negotiation and arbitration. It can be argued that some wars are justified. They should be fought within a set of rules known as the Geneva Convention, which was first drawn up at Geneva in 1864 and revised several times since. For example: prisoners of war should be humanely treated; civilians should not be attacked.

Certain weapons are not approved under the Geneva Convention. These include weapons of mass destruction (for example chemical and biological weapons). In recent years Britain and some other countries have decided that landmines should be banned. However in the past these restraints have frequently been disregarded. Often terror attacks have been made on civilian populations. In World War II whole cities were targeted with high explosives and in the case of Japan, with nuclear weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Some people refuse to take part in war. They are called pacifists. If they refuse to serve in the army during a time of war when all eligible adults are required to serve, or if they are already in the army and refuse to carry out military orders because they believe them to be wrong (e.g. an order to attack unarmed civilians) they are called conscientious objectors.

There is a strong moral case that nuclear weapons should not be made. The mining, transport, processing and testing of nuclear material results in the contamination of the atmosphere with radioactive particles. The radioactivity affects the living and the unborn. Some radioactive elements persist for thousands of years. The existence of nuclear weapons creates fear. A country without such weapons can claim it needs them for its defence. Countries spend large sums of money on these weapons which could be used to better purpose. Secrecy and deceit increase. Their use would destroy society leaving those who survived without food, shelter or medical help. Future generations would be genetically damaged and the land would be contaminated so as to make it uninhabitable.

People with religious views are divided about the problem. However, most of the main world religions condemn violence and all condemn violence against the innocent and the use of unnecessary force. Israel, India and Pakistan are countries where religious belief impacts on government. They have acquired nuclear weapons, using the argument that they are necessary for self-defence.

In Scotland the majority of those leading the Christian churches are opposed to nuclear weapons. Most countries which do not have nuclear weapons are opposed to them. In 1996 the International Court of Justice said nuclear weapons should be regarded as generally illegal. Many military people find nuclear weapons repugnant. They are proud of their profession which they see as necessary for the defence of civilised society and say their use would be against honour, decency and the laws of war.

Views of some religious and political leaders and writers

"Wisdom is better than the weapons of war."

The book of Ecclesiastes

"They who live by the sword shall perish by the sword."

Jesus Christ

"Only with no hatred will hatred be appeased."

This is an eternal law."

Buddha

"To strive for justice, freedom and peace is the duty for each Muslim."

Qu'ran

"And if they [your enemies] incline to peace, do so and put your trust in Allah. Even if they intend to deceive you, remember that Allah is sufficient for you."

Qu'ran

"I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."

Robert Oppenheimer quoting the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, after seeing the first atomic test explosion

"We have genuflected before the god of science, only to find that it has given us the atomic bomb, producing fears and anxieties that science can never mitigate."

Martin Luther King

"My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. This can never happen except through non-violence."

Mahatma Gandhi

"Jaw-jaw is better than war-war."

Winston Churchill

"Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind."

John F Kennedy

"It wasn't inhuman to drop the atom bomb if you believe in saving lives in the long run."

Harlan K Ullman, military strategist

"I do not know how the Third World War will be fought, but I can tell you what they will use in the Fourth — rocks!"

Albert Einstein

"Nuclear Arms, including the readiness to use them, are by their nature morally and theologically wrong."

General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

"Nuclear weapons cannot be justified and deserve condemnation: grave consequences lie ahead if the world is ruled by the militarism of nuclear arms."

Archbishop Renato Martino, Holy See's Permanent Observer at the UN

"Reject unilateral pre-emptive war as a means of resolving international conflict. Demonstrate global leadership by renouncing the first use of nuclear weapons, the development of new nuclear weapons, and the testing of nuclear weapons."

Two of the aims of the US-based SMART Security Platform endorsed, among others, by the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

Further information on the views of specific religious and non-religious groups can be obtained from the following sources:

UK National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís <http://www.bahai.org.uk/>

Baptist Union of Scotland <http://www.scottishbaptist.org.uk/>

The Buddhist Society <http://www.thebuddhistsociety.org/>

Church of England <http://www.churchofengland.org/>

Church of Scotland <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk>

Scottish Episcopal Church <http://www.scotland.anglican.org/>

Muslim Council of Britain <http://www.mcb.org.uk/>

Muslim Council of Scotland <http://www.mcscotland.org/>

Institute of Jainology <http://www.jainology.org/>

Soka Gakkai International <http://www.sgi.org/>

Pax Christi UK <http://paxchristi.org.uk/>

Hindu Council UK <http://www.hinducounciluk.org/>

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) <http://www.quaker.org/>

Religious Society of Friends in Scotland <http://www.quakerscotland.org/>

Office of the Chief Rabbi <http://www.chiefrabbi.org/>

Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland <http://www.bcos.org.uk/>

The Sikh Foundation <http://www.sikhfoundation.org/>

Glasgow Jewish Representative Council <http://www.glasgowjewishrepcouncil.org/>

Sikhs in Scotland <http://www.sikhsinscotland.org/>

Arya Pratinidhi Sabha UK <http://www.aryapratinidhisabha.org.uk/>

The British Humanist Association <http://www.humanism.org.uk/>

Scientists for Global Responsibility <http://www.sgr.org.uk/>

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War <http://www.ippnw.org/>

World Union for the Protection of Life <http://www.wsl-int.de/en/>

Friends of the Earth <http://www.foe.co.uk/>